



June 24, 2015

MEMO TO : Park Board Commissioners

FROM : Malcolm Bromley  
General Manager, Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

SUBJECT : **Blue Flag Program**

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Dear Commissioners,

In May 2014, the Board directed staff to work with local Marinas, Tourism Vancouver, the Georgia Strait Alliance, the Squamish Streamkeepers Society, and Environmental Defence to request a feasibility study to identify potential Blue Flag Program candidates for marinas and beaches in Vancouver. After researching the available options, the following information is provided for your consideration.

### **Background**

The Blue Flag Program is an international environmental 'eco-label' available to beaches and marinas. First developed as a pilot program in France (1985), the initiative was formalized in 1987 to coincide with "European Year of the Environment", launched specifically to address serious concerns about water quality and to promote environmental stewardship. Today, Blue Flag is a trademark certification program available through the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE). In Canada, the program is administered by Environmental Defence, a national environmental charity.

For a candidate location to be awarded a Blue Flag, applicants must satisfy the Blue Flag program criteria organized in four (4) main categories: Water Quality; Environmental Management; Environmental Education; and, Safety and Services. Criteria are further organized as either imperative or guideline. Imperative criteria must meet the prescribed compliance standard, while guideline criteria are strongly encouraged but not mandatory.

Before formal application for Blue Flag certification, all locations must undergo a formal feasibility study through Environmental Defence. Blue Flag Canada assesses each location, beach or marina, and provides recommendations for condition improvement. Once agreement on the recommendations has been reached and improvements initiated, the location becomes a Blue Flag Candidate. Once all criteria have been met, the location is eligible for Blue Flag accreditation.

Blue Flag applications are assessed annually by a national jury. Successful applicants are advanced to the internal jury. With all criteria met and juries satisfied, the location is awarded the Blue Flag Certificate. To maintain program integrity and ensure compliance, Blue Flag Canada performs regular in-season audits on all member locations.

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Following initial interest in the Blue Flag program, Vancouver's eleven (11) lifeguard-supervised beaches (listed below) were reviewed with reference to the imperative criteria published by [Blue Flag Canada](#).

- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| 1. Third Beach               | 7. Locarno Beach                                    |
| 2. Second Beach              | 8. Spanish Banks (East)                             |
| 3. First Beach (English Bay) | 9. Spanish Banks (West)                             |
| 4. Sunset Beach              | 10. Spanish Banks (Extension)                       |
| 5. Kits Beach                | 11. Trout Lake ( <i>*NB. fresh water location</i> ) |
| 6. Jericho Beach             |   |

While a full gap-analysis to certification would be at the discretion of Environmental Defense, compliance to the imperative criteria from Blue Flag Canada indicates Vancouver beaches would require a capital investment of approximately \$110,000 to cover infrastructure upgrades listed below and approximately \$30,000 for more microbiological testing.

- Installation of permanent information boards (*Minimum: 22 in total: 2 per location; 11 locations*)
- Implementation of at least five (5) community-specific educational initiatives each beach (*Minimum: 55 Initiatives; 5 per location*)
- Flagpole installation (*11 total; 1 per location*)
- Testing for intestinal enterococci by independent laboratory\* (*10 ocean beaches*)  
*\*Vancouver Coastal Health currently tests for fecal coliforms. Blue Flag requires testing for enterococci.*
- Testing measures for physical water quality (floatables, debris)
- Establish a management committee consisting of representatives from community groups, clubs, non-profits and conservation authorities
- Information and signage about Blue Flag
- Emergency Plans for pollution risks such as oil spills must be transparent and shared with the municipality by the federal government
- Emergency telephone (direct 911 access) installed in close proximity to the beach (*11 total*)
- Lifesaving stations\* (*28 in total*) equipped with:
  1. Reaching pole;
  2. Ring buoy and rope;
  3. A stand for equipment installed in a permanent fashion every 100m;
  4. Appropriate instructions for how to use the equipment and signage warning of consequences from tampering with the equipment needs;

*\*Lifesaving station needed based on 1 station placed every 100m, excluding the 200m range of lifeguard stations = 28*

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On-going annual program costs are estimated at \$75,000. This would include the yearly license fees of \$16,500 (\$1,500/beach), \$30,000 for microbiological testing, maintenance costs and repairs.

Expenses	Capital (1 <sup>st</sup> year)	Annual (On-going)
Infrastructure upgrades (Blue Flag - imperative criteria)	\$110,000	
Blue Flag - annual fees	\$ 16,500	\$16,500
Biological testing (lab costs)	\$ 30,000	\$30,000
Maintenance		\$28,500
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$156,500</b>	<b>\$75,000</b>

Currently, there are thirty-two (32) Blue Flag locations in Canada - six (6) marinas and twenty-six (26) beaches. Most of the participants - 24 - are located in southern Ontario, with eight (8) beaches located in the City of Toronto. Winnipeg Beach is the westernmost participant. There is no current evidence of program participation in British Columbia or down the Pacific Coast through California.

National and international media attention on tourism to Vancouver and its beaches has been favourable. Vancouver beaches currently enjoy a world-class reputation as safe, beautiful and well-maintained. *Forbes Traveler* recently included Kitsilano Beach on their list of 10 Sexiest Beaches in the World. Blue Flag designation would offer added assurance to this great reputation.

With the current favourable reputation of Vancouver beaches, staff recommend that the Blue Flag program be monitored for future consideration.

Regards,

Malcolm Bromley  
General Manager - Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

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Copy to: PB Senior Management Team  
PB Communications